How to Use a Capo

A capo (pronounced “cape-o”) is a moveable bar that can be attached to the fingerboard of a fretted instrument to uniformly raise the pitch of all the strings. Capos allow us to play songs in different keys, without altering our fingering.

Remember, the musical alphabet is as follows: *A, A#, B, C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, G, G#*

Let’s say we have a song that is in *G* (Major) and the chords are *G, C, A*- and *D*. If we want to transpose (change keys) that song up a half step (1 fret), then we would place the capo at the 1st fret and move our chords up 1 fret as well. Doing this allows us to play in our new key of *G#,* while still allowing us to play in a “feel” of *G*. If we did *NOT* use the capo, we would have to play four bar chords (*G#, C#, A#*- and *D#*) - which is *no fun!*

With our capo at the 1st fret, we will have transposed to *G#* without having to play all those pesky bar chords! This will also allow us to free up some fingers to add ornamental parts to a once basic chord progression.

When I chart a song, I will notate at the top of the page if you need a capo and where you should put it on the neck/fret board. I will also sometimes denote what “feel” the song will be in. For the song example in the above paragraph, I would notate “Capo1(G feel)”.

G, C and *D* are the easier keys (“feels”) to play songs in. You will often find songs that are in another key, but you can simply use a capo and follow the chord structures of those easier keys.

It’s easy to transpose using the number system chart that I have created; if you can work a little basic math, you don’t even need it, though. If you use the musical alphabet above, you could capo 1(*G* feel) to play in *G#*. To play in *A* with a “*G* feel”, capo at the 2nd fret. To play in *B*, with a *G* feel, capo at the 4th fret. Similarly, you can do this for keys *C* and *D*. If you want to play in the key of *D*, but with a “*C* feel”, capo at the 2nd fret.

Capo Key Chart

Capo on Fret Number					
no capo / open	C	G	D	A	E
1	C#	G#	D#	A#	F
2	D	A	E	B	F#
3	D#	A#	F	C	G
4	E	B	F#	C#	G#
5	F	C	G	D	A
6	F#	C#	G#	D#	A#
7	G	D	A	E	B
8	G#	D#	A#	F	C
9	A	E	B	F#	C#

*S*o what type of capo should you buy? *My* favorite brands are *Kyser*, *Shubb* and *G7th*. The Kyser is a very easy to use clamp style of capo. It's also handy because you can easily clamp it to the head stock of your guitar when you're not using it - so you'll always have it when you need it! While I like using the Kyser for the quick "on and off" needed during live acoustic gigs, I have found that it seems to throw my electrics out of tune a bit from the pressure of the spring.

For this reason, I prefer the adjustable style of the Shubb and G7th for when I'm playing live with an electric (if I desire a capo) and for studio work with both acoustics and electrics.